Visual Language- Film Study *Life is Beautiful*

## Structure of a Film

**Shot:** A single 'run' of the camera. This is the basic unit from which a film is constructed. The length (or duration) of a shot depends upon:

* its purpose i.e. establishing a place; to show action; to show reaction
* the pace (or tempo) of the sequence in which it occurs.

**Sequence:** A group of shots depicting one action, or, which seems to belong with or depend upon each other. (Say 3 to 18 shots).

**Scene:** A group of sequences, or, (for short scenes) a group of shots, which:

* depict an event in the story. and
* occur in one place.

## Types Of Shot

**Long Shot [L.S.]:** A distance shot in which a setting, and not a character, is the emphasis. this is generally used to establish the place in which action will occur, hence the term establishing shot. Given its function, a long shot is often used at the beginning of a scene or sequence, and may be combined with a panning movement of the camera to show us a wider area.

**Mid Shot [M.S.]:** A middle distance shot that focuses our attention on a particular subject. With a mid shot the camera is close enough to pick up detail, though still far enough away to be able to follow the subject as s/he/it moves. The mid shot, therefore, is commonly used to show action e.g. as in a fight scene.

**Close Up [C.U.]:** A close shot of an object or person, the aim being to focus our attention on a particular detail. Close ups of objects may serve as the inpoint to a new scene, depicting a new fact or location in the story. Close ups of a person have a number of different functions:

* in an establishing sequence, a close up of someone suggests that s/he is a main character
* the first close up of a character (in a series of shots) establishes point of view i.e. who is watching an event
* a close up is most commonly used to show the reaction of a character, i.e. a reaction shot.

## Camera Movements

**Pan:** Movement from side to side from a stationary position.

**Tilt:** Movement up or down from a stationary position.

**Tracking:** The camera is not stationary but moves to follow a moving object or person. The camera is mounted on a moving device such as a rail platform, a dolly or a vehicle.

**Zoom Out:** Movement outwards away from a subject.

NB: The speed of a camera movement (from very fast to very slow) can dramatically alter its effect.

### Moving From One Shot To Another

**Cut:** The ending of a shot. If the cut is a jerky movement, which seems a little inconsistent with the next shot it is called a jump cut.

**Fade In or Out:** The image appears or disappears gradually. It brightens to full strength over a full second, or darkens to fade out. The fade is often used as a division between scenes.

**Dissolve:** One image fades in while another fades out so that for a few seconds the two are superimposed.

**Inpoint:** An image that starts the scene. Sometimes this inpoint is used to smooth the transition between scenes. As the word suggests the inpoint takes us in to the next shot or scene by making a visual link (a related object or shape) with the outpoint of the previous shot.

## Camera Angles

For each shot, a decision must be made about the angle at which the camera is to be directed at a subject. High and low angles may be used to influence our impression of a particular character.

A character filmed from a low angle will seem strong, powerful, tall, proud, etc whereas a high angle will suggest the subject is weak, insignificant, vulnerable, small etc. Our impression of a structure or object can be manipulated in a similar way.

A distorted angle may be used to make a scene more frightening, or to make the viewer feel anxious, or queasy (especially if fast or jerky camera movement is also used).

## Editing

The process of assembling and splicing together the various shots that comprise a film. Underlying the process is a technique that can be called pairing, i.e. a story is built up by alternating one set of shots with another.

There are common instances of pairing:

* A conversation or confrontation between two characters. The shots alternate from one to the other, angles may be used to suggest inferiority or superiority.
* Shots of a character are alternated with shots of what s/he sees. The first shot of the character is the P.O.V. (It establishes point of view i.e. who is looking).
* Cross-cutting. A sequence of shots in which the alternation is between two different locations (e.g. A burglar creeping into a house in which an unsuspecting victim lies sleeping). The sequence builds to a climax and ends with the two things coming together.

The **Editing Speed** (or **tempo**) of a particular sequence is also an important consideration. Fast editing involves fast cutting. i.e. The shots are 1 to 2 seconds long. Fast editing generates excitement and anticipation as for example in a chase sequence. Slow editing (i.e. Shots are 3 to 10 seconds long), has the opposite effect, calming and relaxing the viewer. Accordingly slow editing is a characteristic of love scenes.